

## Location



## Introduction

Poland is a country in central Europe bordered by the Baltic Sea to the North, Lithuania and Russia (Kaliningrad) to the northeast, Belarus and Ukraine to the east, Slovakia and the Czech Republic to the south, and Germany to the west. It also shares maritime boundaries with Denmark and Sweden.

The country has a coastline spanning 770 km (including the Szczecin and Vistula lagoons), extending from the shores of the Baltic Sea, along the Bay of Pomerania in the west to the Gulf of Gdańsk in the east. The climate is temperate transitional and varies from oceanic in the north-west to continental in the south-east, characterised by warm summers and moderately cold winters. Poland has an abundance of lakes, with more than 2,000 in the northeastern Masurian lake district region.

Poland is divided into 16 administrative provinces called Voivodeships, three of which include coastal areas: the West Pomeranian, Pomeranian and Warmian-Masurian Voivodeships.

## Regional Seas and Biogeography

Baltic Sea (Regional Sea and LME)

## Habitats

Sandbars with large dunes form lagoons and coastal lakes along much of the coast. The two major inlets in the smooth coast are the Pomeranian Bay on the German border in the far northwest (that the Oder river empties into via the Szczecin lagoon) and the Gulf of Gdańsk in the east, where the Żuławy Wiślane (alluvial delta area of the river Vistula) forms a large delta, which includes Sobieszewska island. The Szczecin lagoon, shared by Poland and Germany, is connected to the Pomeranian Bay in the Baltic sea via three straits, which divide the mainland and the islands of Wolin and Usedom (of which most is in Germany). The Vistula lagoon, part of which is in the Russian province of Kaliningrad, is a brackish water lagoon on the easternmost part of the Polish coast, separated from Gdańsk bay by the Vistula spit.

- Wetlands – notable wetland areas with saltmarshes and/or reedbeds include the Świna Delta, the islands of Usedom and Wolin, the Słowiński National Park in the middle of the coast and the Swidwie Lake Nature Reserve in the north west of the country.
- Seagrasses – can be found in the semi-enclosed Puck Bay, in the western part of the Gulf of Gdańsk, north of Gdynia.
- Dunes – huge shifting sand dunes are found in the Słowiński National Park.

## Biodiversity Hotspots

### → Ramsar sites

The **Słowiński National Park** is a RAMSAR site which covers 33 km of coast and includes a belt of shallow coastal waters, sand beaches, huge shifting dunes, lakes and mires (swampy ground). The wetland lies on the migration route of many birds (geese, swans, ducks, waders and plovers) along the southern coast of the Baltic Sea. In winter the unfrozen mouths of the Łeba and Łupawa rivers provide favourable conditions for many wintering bird species, and during spring and autumn the lakes become very important foraging and resting sites for waterbird species. Grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*) can be found in the park.

The **Vistula River Mouth RAMSAR site** includes two areas: the western part is Ptasi Raj (Bird's Paradise) Nature Reserve on Sobieszewska Island and the eastern part which includes the Mewia Łacha Nature Reserve, the main river mouth and an area of sea. The Site is one of the most important areas in Poland for migratory and wintering coastal waterbirds (most numerous of which are long-tailed ducks (VU), tufted ducks (*Aythya fuligula*) and goldeneyes (*Bucephala clangula*). Three species of terns, two of gulls and two of plovers nest on the sandy islands and peninsulas. and is also an important resting area for grey and (to a much lesser extent) harbour seals, hosting Poland's main population of grey seals. Harbour seals (*Phoca vitulina*) occasionally breed at the

Site, the only breeding location of the species in Poland.

### → National Parks and ecological reserves

**Wolinski National Park** is located on an important bird migration route and many species of wetland birds are found during spring and autumn migrations. The Park's waters are a resting place for several thousands of birds of a few seaduck species. Some species of waders nest on the beaches along the shores of the Szczecin lagoon. Nesting is also known for certain duck species in the sea cliffs. Grey seals and harbour porpoise have also been observed in the Park.

**Beka nature reserve**, in Puck Bay, is a sanctuary for many waders, including many which are nesting. The site supports an important site for birds to rest or forage birds during migration. Several species of geese, ducks and swans can appear in large numbers.

**Mechelinski Lake nature reserve**, also in Puck Bay, provides nesting habitat for common ringed plovers (*Charadrius hiaticula*) and white-fronted terns (*Sterna albifrons*), both species being on the Polish RedList. During the migration season large numbers of waders can be found.

### → IBAs

The **Świna delta**, close to the coastal boarder with Germany, is a complex of swampy islands separated by tidal canals, which includes some saltmarsh and reedbed areas and is periodically flooded. The site is home to many breeding, migrating and wintering bird species.

**Puck Bay**, in the most northwestern part of the Gulf of Gdańsk is a very important site for wintering and migrating waterbirds, holding well over 20,000 waterbirds during winter, sometimes exceeding 50,000 birds. Velvet scoters (VU) winter in the Bay. During severe winters the bay is covered by ice and birds have to move elsewhere (usually to nearby harbours). During autumn and spring migration the coastal meadows (sometimes flooded) attract large numbers of waterbirds, particularly waders (up to some thousands), and overhead migration of raptors is pronounced in spring.

**Vistula lagoon**, in the easternmost part of the country in the Bay of Gdańsk, supports large numbers of waterfowl, especially geese and dabbling ducks including some breeding species.

**East Border Waters**, a small area offshore of the Vistula lagoon, provides important habitat in winter for large concentrations of seabirds and seaducks.

### → IMMAs

There are no IMMAs identified in the Baltic, however most of the protected areas in Poland listed above mention the presence of grey seals and harbour porpoise (CR according to the HELCOM Red List) as part of their designation as HELCOM marine protected areas.

## At risk Wildlife

In this section, some individual wildlife species are mentioned followed by a letter in parentheses. These are species included in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species within the top three categories of risk - Vulnerable to extinction (VU), Endangered (EN) or Critically Endangered (CR). A more complete list of IUCN listed species is found in Appendix 1.

### → At risk birds

Poland is known for many coastal and marine bird species, which can be in large concentrations. These include ducks, geese, swans, sandpipers, plovers, grebes, rails, coots, loons, storks, herons, gulls, terns, and occasionally in lower numbers - auks and skuas. Some raptor species are known to hunt along the shores of Szczecin lagoon and also nest in reedbeds around the coast.

### → At risk reptiles

### → At risk mammals

Two pinniped species are found in Poland – grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*) and harbour seals (*Phoca vitulina*) both of which are occasionally breeding. Grey seals haul-out on sandbanks in the mouth of the Vistula river, where high numbers can be seen all year round. Grey seal pups are born around end of February/beginning of March. Harbour seals breed in September and early October after the moulting period. Pups are born on the shore away from the herd at the end of June/beginning of July

Harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*), classified as CR on the HELCOM Red List, are known to occur especially in Puck Bay, but also in the bays of Gdansk and Pomerania. Harbour porpoises have potential

wintering grounds in Poland, especially along the mid and east Polish coast including Gdańsk and Puck Bay. Eurasian otters (*Lutra lutra*) are widespread in rivers and lakes in Poland.

### **Past experience with oil spill and potential risks**

There have been no major oil spills in Polish waters.

## **International and Regional Treaties and Agreements**

### → **Oil spill and HNS Response**

d CLC Convention 69

CLC Protocol 76

CLC Protocol 92

FUND Protocol 76

FUND Protocol 92

FUND Protocol 2003

LLMC Convention 76

LLMC Protocol 96

OPRC Convention 90

HNS Convention 96

HNS PROT 2010

OPRC\_HNS 2000

BUNKERS CONVENTION 01

### → **Marine Biodiversity Protection**

- Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS)

- Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – also known as the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM)

## **Oil Spill Response and HNS Spill Response**

### → **National Contingency Plan?**

The National Oil Spill Contingency Plan is maintained by the Maritime Search and Rescue Service (SAF) Service. It was adopted in 2005 and updated in 2020.

### → **Role of Competent National Authorities**

The authority with responsibility for marine pollution preparedness and response is the Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) Service based in Gdynia. Local contingency plans are coordinated by the SAF Service and approved by one of three maritime regional offices. The National State Fire Service (PSP) has responsibility for pollution response on land. Supervision of response on shore is exercised by the mayor of the municipality where the spill takes place.

## **Oiled Wildlife Preparedness and Response**

### → **Formal guidelines?**

There is no specific legislation in Poland relating to oiled wildlife. A national Working Group for oiled wildlife response was established in 2017, which organised discussions with relevant stakeholders to move towards establishing a national oiled wildlife response strategy.

A 2017 Decree of the Council of Ministers specifies that oiled wildlife response must be included in regional (Voivodeship) crisis management plans and entrusted to the competent national governor. The Pomeranian Voivodeship finalised and adopted its oiled wildlife response plan in 2023. In the Pomeranian region, overall oil spill coordination sits with the Pomeranian Voivodeship – for an incident which has impacts in more than one Voivodeship, the WCZK (Wojewódzkie Centrum Zarządzania Kryzysowego or Provincial Crisis Management Centre) will coordinate the response.

An oiled wildlife response plan is under development for the West Pomeranian region.

### → **Response objectives and strategy**

In the Pomeranian region, rehabilitation will be permitted as a response strategy.

→ **Euthanasia or rehabilitation?**

In the Pomeranian region, before oiled animals are captured, a Beachhead Collection Point (BCP) must be established, from where animals can be taken to rehabilitation facilities. The designation this BCP is handled by the competent municipality where the incident occurred, in agreement with a representative of the PSP forces and the Maritime Office in Gdynia (if the BCP is to be located in the coastal strip). If the number of oiled animals exceeds 30, a suitable location must be found for a temporary rehabilitation facility. The location will be selected by the municipality where oiled animals are impacted, together with the PSP and (if the facility will be in the coastal area), the Maritime Office in Gdynia. The rehabilitation facility will be equipped by the local municipality, supported by the provincial governor if one municipality's resources are insufficient. The PSP and Territorial Defence Forces can assist in setting up a rehabilitation facility. Animals in care are under the supervision of the Voivodeship veterinary inspectorate.

Search and collection is organised by the Voivodeship veterinary inspectorate in Gdansk and carried out by their veterinarians and volunteers as well as WWF Poland. For large spills, the National Society for the protection of Birds (OTOP) can also assist with locating and capturing oiled birds, as well as planning for their release.

→ **Impact assessment**

OTOP carry monitoring of bird populations and participate in the Polish Bird Survey (surveying wintering waterbirds and seabirds), provide an online database of bird observations (including coastal birds). The Ornithological Station of the Museum and Institute of Zoology of the Polish Academy of Sciences is also involved in monitoring of some wetland birds and seabirds. They are the only bird ringing station in Poland.

The Kuling Waterbirds Research Group, associated with the Ornithology Unit of the Department of Ecology and Zoology of Vertebrates at the University of Gdańsk, carries out research on the migration of aquatic birds.

The Prof. Krzysztof Skoira Hel Marine Station at the University of Gdańsk is involved in monitoring of seal and harbour porpoise populations.

WWF Poland, and their Blue Patrol volunteers (see under 'wildlife responders' below) carry out marine mammals and bird monitoring, including grey seal, common seal, ringed seal, harbour porpoise, ringed plover, little tern, sandwich tern, common tern and oystercatcher. Data is kept in an online database.

→ **Notification and early response**

The Pomeranian region oiled wildlife response plan specifies a list of organisations that need to be notified in the event of an oil spill which affects wildlife. The representative of the service, inspection, fire brigade or other entity which first received the information, activates a response and informs their superiors. The relevant mayor notifies the relevant services in the area of the incident as well as the WCZK (who must also be notified of all animals found live or dead).

→ **Wildlife responders**

WWF Poland manages the activities of Blue Patrol, a network of around 200 volunteers who carry out monitoring of marine species along the coastline and can assist with animal rescue and marine mammal strandings.

In the Pomeranian region – WWF Poland, the Ostoja rehab centre, and OTOP will likely get involved in a wildlife rehabilitation operation.

The Regional Veterinary Inspectorate in Gdańsk take a lead on search and collection of oiled animals and one vet is designated in Gdańsk for oiled wildlife response activities. Some private vets are designated to deal with wildlife in general and would likely be called on in a response, but may not have prior experience or training in dealing with oiled wildlife.

→ **Cooperation between stakeholders**

The National Oiled Wildlife Response Working Group includes the Ministry of Climate and Environment, Ministry of the Interior and Administration, General Directorate for Environmental Protection, National Water Management Authority, Voivodeship Offices, Maritime Offices, Maritime Search and Rescue Service, Veterinary Inspectorate, the Wildlife Rescue Centre 'Ostoja', WWF Poland and LOTOS Petrobaltic (part of the Orlen Group).

In 2019, two oil spill exercises were held, one in the NAFTOPORT-Gdańsk port basin and one in Szczecin. Both included oiled wildlife response for impacted birds. Blue Patrol volunteers setup Beachhead Collection Points, collected bird dummies, carried out initial health status assessments and prepared boxes for transport.

**→ Permanent facilities**

The Wildlife Rehabilitation Center "Ostoja", in Pomieczyño in West Pomerania, deals with seabirds as well as terrestrial species. They have a small stockpile of equipment for wildlife response.

The Prof. Krzysztof Skoira Hel Marine Station at the University of Gdańsk runs a seal rehabilitation centre, mainly dealing with abandoned seal pups.

**→ Current processes**

The national Oiled Wildlife Response Working Group meets annually to review national oil spill preparedness events and exchange information on oiled wildlife response and preparedness activities, including status of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship oiled wildlife response plan.

There is cooperation between the stakeholders mentioned under impact assessment, together with authorities including the National Park Services and Maritime Offices.

WWF Poland is a member of the EUROWA (European Oiled Wildlife Response Assistance) network and provides EUROWA training to its staff and Blue Patrol volunteers. Around 40 volunteers have received BASIC EUROWA training. One veterinarian has received EUROWA specialist vet training.

WWF Poland and the two Voivodeships participate in the HELCOM Wildlife Expert Group.

**Documentation and references**

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## Appendix 1

### → At risk birds

**Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)**

Aquatic Warbler / *Acrocephalus paludicola* / VU / Migratory (Apr-Sept) / Breeding  
Lesser White-fronted Goose / *Anser erythropus* / VU / Migratory (winter) /  
Common Pochard / *Aythya ferina* / VU / Migratory / Breeding (spring/early summer)  
Greater Spotted Eagle / *Clanga clanga* / VU / Migratory (winter) /  
Long-tailed Duck / *Clangula hyemalis* / VU / Migratory (winter) /  
Velvet Scoter / *Melanitta fusca* / VU / Migratory (winter) /  
Horned Grebe / *Podiceps auritus* / VU / Migratory (winter) /  
Steller's Eider / *Polysticta stelleri* / VU / Migratory (winter) /  
Black-legged Kittiwake / *Rissa tridactyla* / VU / Migratory (winter) /

### → At risk reptiles

**Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)**

### → At risk mammals

**Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)**